

Memo from

To:

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

### Cousin marriages

"When had we sung that song before", I thought, and then I realized I had corresponded with Abby about this.

With apologies for the stuffiness of callow youth I underline what you should bother to know from that old refrain.

Cousin marriages unquestionably do carry a greater risk of genetic disease in the offspring, by a factor of 2 to 4 for the worse. However, this is of the same order as having children in the late '30s instead of the early 20's; so any couple will have to decide this for themselves. The risk is much worse if there are certain specific diseases in the family, and I would urge that any couple, who are cousins, should seek professional genetic counselling before deciding about having children.

I have copied out an excellent discussion of this issue, for lay readers, from Amram Scheinfeld's book, "Your Heredity and Environment."

Sincerely,

*lfr.*  
*van Buren 7/16/1960*



PROFESSOR JOSHUA LEDERBERG  
Department of Genetics  
School of Medicine  
Stanford University  
Stanford, California 94305